

Jeremiah 35:1-19 The Trait of Reliability Falls Church AM 10/16/2022

If you went tent camping, what is the longest you would stay? A week? A whole month? Today we study a family who had been tent camping for 250 years!

As a symbolic action, like a parable, God told Jeremiah to gather an actual extended family of shepherds without land, people who were always camping in tents. We are not told much about this family before they are summoned into the story. All we know is that these people had been commanded by their founder not to live in houses, not to plant farm fields, and not to drink wine. God told Jeremiah to offer them wine to drink, knowing that they would decline. The point of the parable is that this camping clan was more obedient to the command of their dead ancestor than the people in Jerusalem were to the commands of the living God.

God was emphasizing that the disobedience and sin of His people was the basis for its punishment in exile and the destruction of their city Jerusalem.

Last time we studied chapter 34, about the sin of unreliability, today we study chapter 35 about the good character trait of reliability. Chapter 34 was about promise-breakers and Chapter 35 is about promise-keepers.

That brings us to our main point today: **In order for God to bless His people in a new covenant, two things would be required a) someone to obey God by keeping His vow, and b) some way to cover His people's disobedience.**
1. God ordered a test for the reliability clan. (v.1-5)

Verse 1 shows a jump back in time to the earlier reign of King Jehoiakim. Jeremiah was not yet in prison, so that Jeremiah can go to the temple to do what God asked here. The army of Babylon was attacking, so this family of campers, the Rechabites, entered the walled city of Jerusalem for safety.

Verse 2 God commanded Jeremiah to gather this tent-camping family publicly, in the temple, the "*house of the LORD*" and into "*one of the chambers*" which were meeting rooms. God was providing an example of covenant keeping, to shame His people who were breaking their covenant.

Verses 3-4 Jeremiah did what God asked by gathering that family (don't be confused in verse 3, when a different man named Jeremiah was mentioned).

Verse 5, our prophet Jeremiah put pitchers of wine and cups in front of them, and invited them to "*Drink wine.*" Remember, this was God's instructions.

2. The clan passed the test, and continued to obey their father. (v.6-11)

Verse 6, the clan of Rechabites refused to drink the wine because of the command of their ancestor who ordered that family to never drink wine.

Verse 7, other commands had been given to this eccentric family, such as not building houses and instead living in tents, not sowing seed, which means not having farms and gardens of their own as a source of food. Instead, the family was called to perpetually wander and depend on the food that they find on their

journey. The way that verses 6-7 read, it sounds like someone reciting a catechism or a motto with a brief series of commands they were keeping for centuries.

It is clear that the commands were given by the family founder in order to warn against blending into the values of the society, like ancient Abraham. It reminds us today of the Amish people, who do not mix with society by abstaining from using modern appliances and conveniences. For the Rechabites, their identity as a group surrounded the core value of resisting the comfortable accommodations of settled homes in towns around other people. They had an alternative lifestyle, but not a wicked lifestyle. Instead, an alternative lifestyle that was good and simple, and we are meant to regard it in a positive light.

However, do not get distracted or stuck here. This passage does not debate whether it is right or wrong to drink wine, to live in a house, or to plant crops. What counts as significant in this chapter is that this special family obeyed a command with zeal and consistency. They had the trait of reliability!

Listen to how the Rechabites described themselves in verse 8, “*We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, ourselves, our wives, our sons, or our daughters...*” The family reported to Jeremiah that every person in the family obeyed. Verse 9, they obeyed by not building houses, but instead kept moving where God led them. They did not plant fields or vineyards. Verse 10, their family had lived in tents since their founding two centuries earlier! Their only exception was recent in verse 11, that when the evil King Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon came over to attack the land where they were camping, they decided to run into Jerusalem for safety, until the danger passed.

The Rechabite family were quintessentially a community of listeners! Covenant keepers. The main command of God to His people in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” That phrase takes on the name Shema from the first word in that sentence in the original language, the Hebrew word “Shema = to hear.” In verse 8, the Rechabites said about themselves, “*We have heard (shema) = we have listened, or we have obeyed.*” Again in verse 10, “*we have lived in tents and we have heard (shema) = we have listened, or we have obeyed*” all that was “...commanded us.” Did the Rechabites hear or listen or obey? Yes. Did God’s people hear or listen or obey?

3. God compared that clan’s obedience to His people’s disobedience. (v.12-19)

While the Rechabites were quintessentially a community of listeners, the Israelites were quintessentially a community of those who would not listen!

Verse 12, It was the Word of the LORD. Not generated by Jeremiah!

Verse 13, the audience for God’s lesson was God’s own people. God asked in an accusatory manner, “*Will you not receive instruction and listen to My*

words?” This was an expression of God’s anger and indignation. Could you not accept the nurturing that would meld you into the true identity of this community of covenant keepers?

In verses 14 and 15, interestingly, the whole ministry of all of God’s prophets through the years are sandwiched between the word *shema* at the beginning and the end. Look at the very end of verse 14 for the phrase “*listened to Me,*” and again at the very end of verse 15. Both are the Hebrew word *shema*, which is listen/hear/obey. The people would not listen, then God sent the whole ministry of all of God’s servants the prophets, but nothing changed, because at the condition of God’s people at the end was the same condition – still not listening. Listening was required for staying in the land, and so a potential of land loss means the punishment of an exile is in view. Land-keeping is only possible through covenant-keeping, which is listening and obeying!

Verse 16, the contrast with God’s people the command-breakers is painted clearly with the command-keepers the Rechabite clan.

Verse 17, the first instance of 2 instances of the word “*therefore*” introduces the verdict onto Israel - a disaster ordered by God

But because in verse 18, the Rechabites were obedient to the commands that they received, then in verse 19, the second instance of the word “*therefore*” introduced the verdict for the Rechabites. They get a different result! God said to the clan of Rechab “...*shall never lack a man to stand before Me.*” This is shocking because it was the royal language of God’s promise previously given only to kings and priests. Back in Jeremiah 33:17-18, God had promised to the clan of David to never lack a man on the throne and to the priests descending from Levi to never lack a man to serve in God’s presence. Now to the Rechabites, for God to say never lack a man to stand before Me, was a subtle announcement about the end of the dynasty of David, the death of the king, the loss of land, and exile.

So, the question is supposed to occur to us as we read this. Why would God be giving such a strong reward to the clan of the obscure Rechabites?

Answer: because God was serious about the trait of reliability.

The people of God had the sin of unreliability, as we saw from chapter 34, but the people of the Rechabite clan had the character trait of reliability, as we see in chapter 35.

The final words that the Rechabites would “*stand before Me*” was a phrase found over 100 times in the OT. It referred to standing before your supervisor with an attitude of service. The fact that God used this phrase to refer to this wandering shepherd clan did not imply that they would assume a priestly role. Rather, it was a promise that this family would not be destroyed.

Fast forward 150 years, and we read in Nehemiah 3:14, after the exile, that a descendant from this family of Rechab was faithfully serving the LORD by

repairing the temple during its rebuilding, setting its doors and bolts. So, God's promise was already fulfilled once in ancient history.

Later, God's promise to the reliable Rechabites was fulfilled again in the coming of Christ. Who stands before the LORD God? His son Jesus Christ, the faithful one. Jesus is the only reliable one. Jesus is the only One who actually kept the commands given to Him by His Father in heaven. The camping Rechabites were an example that pointed forward to Jesus, who said in Luke 9:58, "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*" The Rechabites were faithful to their founder's commands, but they were sinners in other ways, who did not earn God's favor in the new covenant. Rather, they pointed forward to God's plan to fulfill the new covenant with someone else's obedience. The one faithful covenant keeper Jesus. In all of history, it was only Jesus who perfectly kept the new covenant commands.

The apostle Paul explained all of this in Romans 5. Going all the way back, the first man Adam was our covenant head, but he sinned, and we humans all broke the covenant in Adam, including those humans in the Rechabite clan. But then Christ came and became the second Adam, and became the new covenant head for any who trust in Him alone for salvation. Romans 5:19, "*...as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*"

This is **our main point** in our study today: *In order for God to bless His people in a new covenant, two things would be required a) someone to obey God by keeping His vow, and b) some way to cover His people's disobedience.* Jesus gave us both. Jesus obeyed God and kept the covenant. Jesus also covered our disobedience. That is the gospel. We are promise-breakers, and Christ is the promise-keeper on our behalf.

Concluding applications:

1. Repent of your sin of unreliability. You have to admit about yourself that you are not reliable. You are unfaithful. You do not always obey God. You are not always a person of your Word. You do not always follow through. You have the sin of unreliability. You are not the faithful obedient campers, you are the sinners in Jerusalem, who deserve God's punishment of exile and destruction. Admit that you are not reliable.

2. Trust in Christ alone, the only reliable one. He is not just an example. He is our representative. Christ Jesus kept the new covenant for us, when we could not keep it. He is the only covenant-keeper, the only truly obedient person. He lived a perfect life and gave us that perfect record as our standing with God. Since God was willing to send His own people into exile to punish them for their sins, that

pointed the way to the cross. When God's own perfect Son had our sins placed upon Him, then God the Father and God the Son were willing to have Jesus punished for our sins.

God giving the promise of life to the Rechabites shows the hope for the future for anyone.

The pathway of loyalty toward God was for Jesus to submit to the punishment of the cross. God's judgment on the sin of His people fell upon His own Son Jesus! In that way God alone is worshiped, and His covenant blessings are assured. To refuse the reality of the cross of Christ for us is to not listen to God! This is the path of loyalty. This is covenant keeping. By faith we receive the new covenant that God has made with us in Christ Jesus. His death is sufficient to cleanse us of our wrongs. His perfect life is granted to us.

3. Listen to the Word of God. Listen to God when His Spirit speaks to your conscience. Listen to Jesus Christ as He calls you to believe in His name and receive salvation! Listen to your heavenly Father when He guides you about what He wants you to do with your life.

Our lives are given to us by another. Our lives are evaluated by another. Our lives are punished by another. Our punishment is received by another. Our lives are rescued by another. Commands are given to us by another. Grace is given to us by another. To understand this is to be listening to God. This is being loyal to God. This is showing the trait of reliability or faithfulness to God.

4. In Christ, become reliable, and let that light shine to the world. Christ gives us grace to become reliable. Keep your vows. Keep your promises. Do what you said you would do. As Christians banded together like a family clan in the church, we become like the reliable Rechabites, and God uses our faithfulness to show the world how things could be for them! Matthew 5:14,16, Jesus said, "*You are the light of the world....let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*"

Again we fast forward a few years later in Jerusalem when God's grace came to a man from another country known as Ethiopia. In Christ, the intention of God had become a reality. All the nations are open to inheriting eternal life by faith in Christ Jesus. Consider how this is spelled out in Acts chapter 8. One of the deacons named Philip was sent to speak to the man from Ethiopia. This man had come to Jerusalem in order to worship God, and was now returning home to Ethiopia. He was seated in his chariot that was departing from Jerusalem, and the man from Ethiopia was reading the writings of one of God's prophets named Isaiah. This is when Philip approached him and asked whether he understood what he was reading from Isaiah, "*like a sheep he was led to the slaughter...*" And

Philip beginning with this Scripture, told the good news about Jesus to a man from Ethiopia. The man was converted and then was baptized, and God sent Philip on to preach the gospel to all the towns. Anyone from any town and any nation could turn to God to receive the gift of life! This is stated in so many words in Acts 11:18, “...*to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.*”